



DISASTER AND EMERGENCY PLANNING

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Emergency and Disaster Planning

A Best Practices Guide



This Guide Contains

- Suggestions on procedures and processes
- Tips for successful planning
- Contact information for the Secretary of State's Office

Introduction

General Information

In order to prepare for a variety of emergencies or disasters that can affect elections conducted statewide or regionally, the Colorado Secretary of State has developed this guide to assist designated election officials with emergency and disaster planning. This document provides recommendations, tips, and useful tools for contingency planning.



This document has been prepared after research regarding recommendations from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission as well as various plans and laws from states who have previously implemented procedures relating to emergency and disaster contingency plans. This document should be used as a starting point for discussion of this topic and may not be fully comprehensive.

Designation of Runners or Troubleshooters- Designate staff or extra election judges as “runners” so that election supplies can be quickly deployed to polling locations. It is recommended that runners be equipped with backup voting equipment (that has been tested), ballots, and other polling place supplies in the event that a polling place depletes inventory or is unexpectedly relocated. Runners should have sufficient supplies available to respond to an assigned polling place in an efficient manner. Because some jurisdictions may cover a large geographic area, multiple runners may be necessary and should be assigned a specific geographic section of the county. It is helpful to provide runners with maps including the location of each of their assigned polling places. For large voting facilities, also consider providing runners with pre-drawn maps of the polling location.



***“Before anything else,
preparation is the key to
success.”***

-Alexander Graham Bell

Evacuation of DEO Office- Develop and distribute written procedures for evacuating staff at the DEO's office in case of a bomb threat, fire, or other incident. Train staff on securing ballots, voting equipment, and other election related items as well as contacting the appropriate authorities. Consider establishing a scripted telephone message that may be used in such emergencies. Institute evacuation drills so that staff may practice proper evacuation procedures.

Scripted Phone Message- In advance of election day, develop telephone scripts that may be used if a disaster or emergency occurs. Scripts should include contact information for the public and media. It is vital to prepare



these scripts in advance so that the DEO would only need to print out the script and program it into the phone system. If your phone system allows for prerecorded messages that can be turned on or off, you may wish to record all scripts in advance so that they will be available if needed.

Designation of On-Call Pollworkers- Identify potential on-call election judges in advance of each election. These judges must be fully trained and available to serve in a polling place on short notice. Although funding may be an issue for designating on-call pollworkers, having them trained and available could be critical to the success of an election. You may wish to assign office staff to this task and/or work with the applicable governing board or local service organizations to identify individuals that might be available for a small cost to the DEO. The State of Colorado encourages its employees to serve as election judges.

Making the Right Contacts

Contact State, County and Local Emergency Management Offices-

Contact your local and/or state Emergency Management offices to review existing contingency plans and other information. These offices may have existing plans for local or state emergencies not specifically related to the conduct of elections, but which contain valuable information about resources that may be available to DEOs. When contacting Emergency Management offices, DEOs may also wish to discuss options currently available and the need for further contact. Emergency Management offices can be a wealth of information and have the necessary skills, contacts, and sometimes resources, to assist DEOs with formulating a local plan. It is recommended that the DEO establish a "Go-To" contact person in the event an emergency occurs.

Contact Other Local Agencies and Departments-

Work with other county and local agencies, such as the Sheriff's Office or Police Department, Department of Transportation, and Commissioners' or City Council Offices to identify resources that may be quickly allocated when responding to emergencies or disasters. Such events may include severely inclement weather thereby creating a need to deploy four-wheel drive vehicles to polling places, provisions for restocking polling places when election supplies

are low or gone, and monitoring of polling place security. Often, local law enforcement has the ability to dispatch or assign officers to closely watch polling places by regularly driving by locations and ensur-

Tip!

Identify your contacts as early as possible. Don't wait until the election is just around the corner.

ing that officers are stationed within close proximity in case an event requiring intervention occurs. The Board of County Commissioners and/or City Councils can be instrumental in coordinating such activities and ensuring necessary resources are allocated.

In advance of election day, establish which jurisdiction each polling location is in (i.e. city police, county sheriff, city department of transportation, etc.)



so that the correct agency can be contacted quickly in the event of an emergency. Your county GIS staff may be extremely useful with this process. It is recommended that the DEO establish a “Go-To” contact person should an emer-

gency occur. DEOs may wish to enter into intergovernmental agreements with these agencies to outline duties and responsibilities.

Tip!

Establish a “Go-To” person for every agency on your contact list. Pick people you can rely on to get the job done.

Contact List for Mission-Critical Staff and Agencies- Develop and make available to staff, election judges, and other necessary parties, a contact list for mission-critical staff. Include the DEO, election director or manager, IT support, law enforcement, phone bank, power company representative, facilities representatives, and/or other key individuals that might be contacted during an emergency. Consider using a colored, laminated card so that the information can be easily found.

ensuring that officers are stationed in close proximity to voting locations. Make certain that election judges have contact information available.

It is recommended that DEOs provide election judges with pre-drawn room layouts to ensure exits are not blocked and entrances are secure.

Bomb Threat Protocol- Each DEO who is responsible for conducting an election is advised to develop procedures for evacuating and relocating a polling place in the event of a bomb threat. Train election judges on items such as securing equipment (when safety permits); evacuating electors; notifying appropriate parties, such as law enforcement, or building security; and proper methods of notification that the polling place has changed. At all times the safety of the election judges and electors is most critical. However, when permissible, other factors such as equipment security should be considered. Develop an easily identifiable and locatable “Quick Reference Card” for such events.

Determine Alternative Office Space- In advance of each election, identify alternative office space in the event that the main facility is unavailable for any reason. DEOs are encouraged to work with their governing board to identify and secure such locations. Establish procedures to procure and have on site at the alternate location office space, desks, computers, phones, access to the voter registration system, if applicable, and other election supplies. It is recommended that DEOs work closely with their information technologies staff and/or governing board for a smooth transition in the event that the election office must be relocated.

Personal Safety is Number 1!

- ✓ Procedures should ensure that the safety of judges and voters comes first.
- ✓ Consider practice drills during judges training.
- ✓ Provide law enforcement with diagrams of your polling places.
- ✓ Secure equipment and ballots whenever possible.

Be Prepared!

Polling Place Relocations and Securing Equipment-

DEOs are strongly encouraged to develop procedures for securing voting equipment, pollbooks, and supplies when a polling place must be relocated. The safety of electors and election judges must be the first priority. If, however, the event causing a polling place relocation allows for securing equipment and material in a safe environment (such as prolonged power outage, flooding, etc.) election judges should be trained in the procedures to properly secure election materials.

Voting equipment, ballots, and electronic pollbooks among other items should be secured whenever possible. When using DREs, it

may become necessary to switch to paper ballots in the event of an emergency so adequate supplies need to be available.

"One of the tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency."

-Arnold Glasgow

Instruct judges to contact the DEO if it becomes necessary to relocate a polling place. Consider having pre-made relocation signs available. Remember that when

transporting equipment, it is important to have a bi-partisan team of judges overseeing the process. It is advised that DEOs create a "Quick Reference Card" for these procedures.

Polling Place Security- DEOs are encouraged to carefully consider security measures for polling places. Partner with local law enforcement agencies to discuss what funding resources may be available. Although voting generally occurs safely and efficiently, recent events around the nation have brought attention to the need for heightened security. Consider coordinating with law enforcement to have polling places placed on patrol routes and

Develop an Action Plan



Development of an Action Plan for Identified Scenarios- Identify the top five most probable problems that might occur regardless of whether the event has ever actually occurred. Once these events are identified, develop an action plan specific to each scenario and establish procedures to be followed. Include who is responsible for each task, what resources are required, what agencies will be contacted, what area will be designated for media, and the name of the designated media contact. Prior to election day,

establish media contacts for local television and radio stations in order to expedite communication.

Action Plans should:

- ✓ Be identified for your top five most likely occurrences.
- ✓ Have written procedures on hand and easily accessible.
- ✓ Be reviewed at least annually, but more often as needed.
- ✓ Shared with key staff prior to election day.

Communication with Power, Telephone, and Water Companies-

Communicate with your electricity, telephone, and water/sewer providers in advance of every election to inform the companies that a polling place is being used. DEOs should request that these companies limit any work near polling places that could cause a power, phone, or water outage. In the event of an outage, judges are instructed to contact the DEO who in turn contacts the applicable company.

Power-Failure Procedures- DEOs using electronic voting equipment should ensure that election judges are well trained regarding procedures for power failure. In all instances, electronic equipment is required to have a battery backup so



that voting can continue if power fails. However, judges must be fully trained in implementing this process so that voting can continue efficiently. Be prepared to implement backup procedures consistent with Rule if you use an electronic poll-

book. Election judges should also be trained to notify the DEO of a power failure. Consider developing a “Quick Reference Card” that outlines procedures for power failure. In the event of such failure, contact the building’s manager or the power company to ascertain when power is projected to be restored. If the estimate is longer than the battery backup will last, the DEO should begin planning for alternatives. DEOs may wish to consider acquiring one or more generators that can be deployed to polling places. Because power generators can be very cost-prohibitive, DEOs are encouraged to work closely with their governing board to secure resources for these purchases.

Communications Outage Plan- Consider contacting local resources to determine if hand held radios or similar devices could be made available for election day. In the event that phone lines and cell phone service becomes unavailable, hand held radios may be the sole available form of communication between the DEO and election judges. DEOs who do not have their own resources for procurement of this technology should contact local law enforcement or other agencies to determine if hand held radios can be made available on a contingent basis.

Identify and Establish Alternate Polling

Places- In advance of each election, DEOs are advised to actively identify alternate polling places. When searching for alternative polling places, the location and accessibility of the building should be considered. Consider government offices, community centers, churches, and any other location that can serve as a polling



place. Prior to the election, DEOs may wish to enter into agreements or contracts with such facilities in the event that a location is activated. When identifying and establishing alternate polling places, special consideration should be taken when considering vote centers due to accessibility of computer networking. It is also recommended that DEOs consider traffic control procedures when relocating polling places.

Alternate Polling locations:

- ✓ Identify well before election day.
- ✓ Plan for extra parking and traffic control.
- ✓ Consider entering into an IGA/MOU with the facility outlining responsibilities in the event the location is activated.
- ✓ Have written relocation procedures available to judges.